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Buddhism

BUDDHISM AND CHRISTIANITY.

A CRUSADE WHICH MUST BE MET.

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On the 9th of November *The New York Herald* published an article of four columns and a half, over the signature of Baron Harden Hickey, a professed Buddhist and a missionary chosen to promulgate Buddhist doctrines in the United States. To an interviewer of another paper Baron Hickey has expressed the belief that America is a peculiarly favorable field for the spread of Oriental doctrines.

The design of the article referred to, which was plausible and rather ably written, was to prove that the history and doctrines of the early Christianity were largely borrowed from Buddhist sources, and that he himself was a Buddhist. A reply which was sent to *The Herald* was refused admission to its columns, but inasmuch as this crusade is being waged in all parts of the United States where it ought to be met by the defenders of the Christian faith, that reply is herewith given in the columns of *The Missionary Review*. While well-established Christians and friends of missions are not to be disturbed by such assailments as those of Baron Hickey, it is to be remembered that there is a vast borderland lying between the Christian church and the infidel associations of the country, and that it embraces millions of people, especially of the young; and so long as our weapons of defense are so numerous and so potential, it is not wise to leave this broad, neutral territory to the mercy of the enemy. The fact that many of the most influential and extensively circulated of our secular papers discriminate in favor of skepticism and irreligion, as being more sensational, renders it all the more necessary that the Christian church should be alert, and that through every legitimate avenue, the clear and convincing truth of Christianity should be as widely circulated and defended as are the manifold errors of our time.

The assumption that Christ became a follower of Buddha is not new. There lies before me, a *Buddhist Catechism*, by Subhadra, which makes the same allegation. It declares that “the fundamental tenets and the personal character of the founder of Christianity are of Buddhist origin”; that “Jesus was an Arahāt and attained Nirvana.” Hardon Hickey goes farther and calls him the Maitreyeh whom Buddha predicted.

There are a few truths mingled with Baron Hickey’s statements which should be distinguished from his erroneous conclusions. It is true that a limited intercourse was established between India and Greece by the conquests of Alexander, 327 B.C. A few references to Indian customs are found in Strabo, Arrian and Pliny, but it is the wildest assumption to claim that an influence which was so faint even in the great commercial marts, reached and moulded the peasant population of a Judean village, or that the influence was distinctively Buddhistic. Again it is true that asceticism prevailed throughout the East; but that the fasting of Christ was borrowed from Buddhism is absurd. Moses fasted forty days in Sinai centuries before Buddha was born. Besides, Indian asceticism belonged to Brahmanism and not to the Buddha. It was, indeed, practised by the Essenes, as it was also by the ancient Druids, the Peruvians, the Mexicans, and even the Hottentots. Among the Jews there was an ascetic school of prophets at Gilgal centuries before Buddha’s time.

The field of controversy on which Baron Hickey draws his sword has been fought over for the last hundred years, and the parallels which he presents have been exploded over and over again. A century ago Lientenant Wilford espoused the theory that the entire civilization of Egypt, Palestine, Greece and Rome, including Christianity, had come from India. He importuned the pundits to search for manuscripts, and for a consideration they met the demand. He filled the magazines of Europe with his discoveries. But at last he was constrained to confess publicly that he had been the dupe of Brahman fraud.

A Frenchman by the name of Jacolliot has made a similar attempt in our own time, aiming to show that the life of Christ was a plagiarism upon the story of the Hindu Krishna. He, too, collected manuscripts and translated them; but Professor Max Muller has honey-combed his pompous displays of Oriental learning, and remanded him to the same category of dupes with Lientenant Wilford. In volume V. of “Chips from a German Workshop,” he says: “Much of the so-called Sanskrit is not Sanskrit at all, and Jacolliot’s ancient Vedic

quotations are not Vedic and not ancient; they simply belong to the last half of the nineteenth century."

Ages ago Porphyry adopted the same tactics, alleging that many things in the life of Christ had been anticipated by Pythagoras; and Julia Domna, wife of Severus, prompted Philostratus to work up a life of Apollonius of Tyana, which should match the history of Christ. (Uhlhorn's "Conflict," etc.) The very latest charge of plagiarism against Christianity has recently been made by the Aryas of India, who allege that the Westminster catechism has stolen its doctrinal statements from them.

Baron Hickey leaves us a little in doubt as to whether the copying from Buddha is charged upon Christ and his immediate disciples or upon the "creed-mongers of Alexandria" at a later day, or whether all were concerned in the fraud. He thinks that there is no doubt that Christ studied Buddhism and became a disciple, and that Buddhist influence widely prevailed in Palestine. This implies that the Gospel history was in the outset strongly colored by the Buddhist narrative, and that Christ Himself adapted the events of His life to the Buddhist story. The emphasis, however, is put upon the plagiarism of the Alexandrine "creed-mongers." In replying as briefly as possible to Baron Hickey, I shall endeavor to cover all these implications :

In strong contrast with these cheap assertions of Alexandrine corruption and plagiarism is the frank admission of such keen critics as Renan, Weiss, Volkmar, Schenkland Hitzig, that the Gospel story as we have it was written during a generation in which some of the companions of Jesus still lived. Renan says of Mark's Gospel that "it is full of minute observations, coming, doubtless, from an eye-witness," and he asserts that Matthew, Mark and Luke were written "in substantially their present form by the men whose names they bear." These Gospels were the work of men who knew Jesus; Matthew was one of the twelve; John, in his Epistle, speaks of himself as an eye-witness. They were written in a historic age and were open to challenge. They were nowhere contradicted in contemporary history; they fit their environment and their age.

How is it with the authenticity of Buddhist literature? Oldenberg says: "For the *when* of things men of India have never had a proper organ;" and Max Muller declares to the same effect that "the idea of a faithful, literal translation seems altogether foreign to Oriental minds." He also informs us that there is not a single Sanskrit manuscript relating to Buddhism which is a thousand years old, and

scarcely one that can claim five hundred years. For centuries after Gautama's time nothing was written; all was transmitted by word of mouth. Buddhists themselves say that Pali canonical texts were written about 88 B.C.

Any fair comparison of the two histories should confine itself to the writings which are regarded as canonical and whose dates can be fixed. No more importance should be attached to the later Buddhist legends than to the "Apocryphal Gospels," or to the absurd "Christian Legends," which appeared in the middle ages. The Buddhist canon was adopted by the council of Patna, 242 B.C. The legends which Baron Hiekey compares with the canonical story of Christ are not included in that canon, or, at most, very few of them. They are drawn from certain poetical books written much later, and holding about the same relation to the Buddhist canon that the "Paradise Lost" and "Paradise Regained," of Milton, bear to the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. Who would think of quoting "Paradise Lost" in any sober comparison of Biblical truth with the teachings of other religions?

Even the canonical literature, that which is supposed to contain the true history and teachings of Buddha, is far from authoritative, owing to the acknowledged habit—acknowledged even by the author of the Dhammapada—of adding commentaries, notes, etc., to original teachings. Not only was this common among Buddhist writers, but even more surprising liberties were taken with the narrative. For example, the legend describing Buddha's leave-taking of his harem is clearly borrowed from an earlier story of Yasa, a wealthy young householder of Benares, who, becoming disgusted with his harem, left his sleeping dancing girls, and fled to the Buddha for instruction. Davids and Oldenberg, in translating this legend from the "Mahavagga," say, in a note: "A well-known incident in the life of Buddha has evidently been shaped after the model of this story," and they declare that "*nowhere in the Pali Pitakas is this scene of Buddha's leave-taking mentioned.*"

As another evidence of the way in which fact and fiction have been mixed and manipulated for a purpose, one of the legends, which has often been presented as a parallel to the story of Christ, represents the Buddha as repelling the temptation of Mara by quoting texts of "scripture," and the scripture referred to was the Dhammapada. The blunder here is amusing; first, because the Dhammapada was compiled hundreds of years after Buddha's time, and second, there were no "scriptures" in Buddha's time, for nothing was writ-

ten till two or three centuries later; and third, Buddha is made to quote his own subsequent teachings, for the Dhammapada claims to consist of the sacred words of the “enlightened one.” Most of the legends of Buddhism were wholly written after the beginning of the Christian era, and it cannot be shown that any were written in their present form until two or three centuries of that era had elapsed. T. Rhys Davids says of the “Lalita Vistara,” which contains a very large proportion of them, that “there is no real proof that it existed in its present form before the year 600 A.D.” The “Romantic Legend” cannot be traced farther back than the third century A.D. Oldenberg says, “No biography of Buddha has come down to us from ancient times, from the age of the Pali texts, and we can safely say that no such biography was in existence then.” Beal declares that the Buddhist legend as found in the various epics of Nepal, Thibet and China, “is not framed after any Indian model (of any date), but is to be found worked out, so to speak, among Northern peoples, who were ignorant of, or indifferent to, the pedantic stories of the Brahmans. In the Southern and primitive records the terms of the legend are wanting. *Buddha is not born of a royal family; he is not tempted before his enlightenment; he works no miracles, and he is not a Universal Saviour.*”

The chances are decidedly that if any borrowing has been done it was on the side of Buddhism. Mr. Hickey’s assertion that 30,000 Buddhist monks from Alexandria once visited Ceylon (and he gives this not as a legend but as a historic fact) is absurd on the face of it; but that a Christian colony settled in Malabar at a very early day is attested by the presence of thousands of their followers even to this day.

Christianity has always been restrictive and opposed to admixtures with other systems. It repelled the Neo-Platonism of the “creed-mongers” of Alexandria (they borrowed from Plato, not from Buddha), and it fought for two or three centuries against Gnosticism, Manichaeism and similar heresies; and the assumption, in the face of all this, that the Christian Church went out of its way to copy Indian Buddhism, must be due either to gross ignorance or to reckless misrepresentation.

On the other hand, it is in accordance with the very genius of Buddhism to borrow. It has absorbed every indigenous superstition, and entered into partnership with every local religious system from the Devil worship of Burmah and Ceylon to the Taouism of China and the Shintoo of Japan.

In its long-continued contact with Christianity it has changed

from the original atheism of Gautama to various forms of theism, and in some of its sects, at least, from a staunch insistence on self-help alone to an out-and-out doctrine of salvation by faith. This is true of the Shin and Yodo sects of Japan. From recognizing no God at all at first, Buddhism had, by the seventh century A.D., a veritable trinity with attributes resembling those of the Triune God of the Christians, and by the tenth century it had five trinities with one Supreme Adi-Buddha over them all. Each reader must judge whether these late interpolations of the system were borrowed from the New Testament Trinity which had been proclaimed through all the East many centuries before.

Buddhism is still absorbing various elements through the aid of its various apologists. Sir Edwin Arnold has greatly added to the force of its legends by the Christian phrases and Christian conceptions which he has read into them. Toward the close of the "Light of Asia" he also introduces into the Buddha's sermon at Kapilavastu the teachings of Herbert Spencer and others of our own time.

Even the "analogies" of the Buddhist legends, as a late apologist calls them, are undergoing a rapid development. Professor Seydel was ingenious enough, with the help of fact and fancy, to make out fifty-one "parallels" to the Gospel history; Baron Hickey has up to date "one hundred." Doubtless still more are to follow.

In discussing the specific charge of copying Buddhist legends in the Gospel narratives, we are met at the threshold by insurmountable improbabilities. To any one who understands the spirit of Judaism and its attitude toward heathenism of all kinds, it is simply inconceivable that the Christian disciples, whose aim it was to propagate the faith of their Master in a Jewish community, should have borrowed old Indian legends, which, by the very terms of Baron Hickey's supposition, must have been widely known as such. And our Buddhist friend must admit that it is a little strange that the Scribes and Pharisees who were intelligent, and as alert as they were bitter, should never have exposed this transparent plagiarism. The great concern of the Apostles was to prove to Jews and Gentiles that Jesus was the Christ of Old Testament prophecy. The whole drift of their preaching and their epistles went to show that the Gospel history rested squarely and uncompromisingly on a Jewish basis. Peter and John, Stephen and Paul constantly "reasoned with the Jews out of their own Scriptures." How unspeakably absurd is the notion that they were trying to palm off on those keen Pharisees a Messiah who, though in the outset at Nazareth he publicly traced his

commission to Old Testament prophecy, was all the while copying an atheistic philosopher of India.

It is equally inconceivable that the Christian fathers should have copied Buddhism. They resisted Persian mysticism as the work of the devil, and it was in that mysticism, if anywhere, that Buddhist influence existed in the Levant. Whoever has read Tertullian's withering condemnation of Marcion may judge how far the fathers of the Church favored the heresies of the East. Augustine had himself been a Manichean mystic, and when after his conversion he became the great theologian of the Church, he must have known whether the teachings of the Buddha were being palmed off on the Christian world. The great leaders of that age were men of thorough scholarship and of the deepest moral earnestness. Many of them gave up their possessions and devoted their lives to the promotion of the truths which they professed. Scores of them sealed their faith by martyr deaths.

But even if we were to accept the flippant allegation that they were all imposters, yet we should be met by an equally insurmountable difficulty in the utter silence of the able and bitter assailants of Christianity in the first two or three centuries. Celsus prepared himself for his well-known attack on Christianity with the utmost care, searching history, philosophy and every known religion from which he could derive an argument against the Christian faith. Why did he not strike at the very root of the matter by exposing those stupid "creed-mongers" who were attempting to play off upon the intelligence of the Roman world a clumsy imitation of the far-famed Buddha? It was the very kind of thing that the enemies of Christianity wanted. Why should the adroit Porphyry attempt to work up a few mere scraps of resemblance from the life of Pythagoras and why should the wife of a Roman emperor employ a man to trump up precisely such a story as our baronial friend now asks us to believe, when all they had to do was to lay their hands upon familiar legends which afforded an abundance of the very articles in demand?

But altogether the most stupendous improbability lies against the whole assumption that Christ and His followers based their "essential doctrines" on the teachings of the Buddha. The early Buddhism was atheistic. This is the common verdict of Davids, Childers, Sir Monier Williams, Kellogg and many others. The Buddha declared that "without cause and unknown is the life of man in this world," and he recognized no higher being to whom he owed reverence.

The "Buddhist Catechism," to which I have already referred, shows that modern Buddhism has no recognition of God.

It says (page 58): "Buddhism teaches the reign of perfect goodness and wisdom *without a personal God*, continuance of individuality *without an immortal soul*, eternal happiness without a local heaven, the way of salvation without a vicarious Saviour, redemption worked out by each one himself without any prayers, sacrifices and penances, without the ministry of ordained priests, without the intercession of saints, *without divine mercy*." And then, by way of authentication, it adds: "These and many others which have become the fundamental doctrines of the Buddhist religion were recognized by the Buddha in the night of his enlightenment under the bodhi tree."

And yet we are told that this is the system which Christ and His followers copied! Compare this passage with the Lord's Prayer or with the discourse upon the lilies and its lesson of trusts — I appeal not merely to Christian men, but to *any* man who has brains and common-sense—was there ever so preposterous an attempt to establish an identity of doctrines?

But what is the evidence found in the legends themselves? Several leading Oriental scholars, and men not at all biased in favor of Christianity, have carefully examined the subject, and have decided that there is no connection whatever. Professor Seydel, of Leipsic, who has given the most scientific plea for the so-called coincidences, of which he claims there are fifty-one, has classified them as: (1) Those which have been merely accidental, having arisen from similar causes and not necessarily implying any borrowing on either side. (2) Those which seem to have been borrowed from the one narrative or the other, and (3) those which he thinks were clearly copied by the Christian writers. In this last class he names but five out of the fifty-one. Professor S. H. Kellogg in *The Light of Asia and The Light of the World* has ably refuted them.

Kuenen, who has little bias in favor of Christianity, and who has made a very thorough examination of Seydel's parallels, has completely refuted these five. (See "National Religion and Universal Religion," page 362.) And, speaking of the whole question, he says: "I think we may safely affirm that we must abstain from assigning to Buddhism the smallest direct influence on the origin of Christianity." He also says of similar theories of De Bunsen, "A single instance is enough to teach us that inventive fancy plays the chief part in them." ("Hibbert Lectures," 1882.)

Rhys Davids, whom Subhadra's "Buddhist Catechism" approves as the chief exponent of Buddhism, says on the same subject: "I can find no evidence of any actual or direct communication of those ideas common to Buddhism and Christianity from the East to the West." Oldenberg denies their early date, and Beal denies them an Indian origin of any date.

Let us now consider Baron Hickey's analogies *seriatim* :

1. "The genealogies of both Buddha and the Christ are traced from their fathers, not their mothers." This parallel would fit Mohammed as well as Buddha. The whole argument rests upon the assumption that the mother of Buddha was a virgin, which is contrary to canonical Buddhist history. The *Sacred and Historic Book of Ceylon* translated by Edward Upham, tells us that Buddha was born in wedlock. The late King of Siam, in a sketch of the Buddha, says that "he was born of natural generation." Subhadra in his *Catechism* says that "his parents were King Suddhodana and Queen Maya." Even the wild Jataka legends of Ceylon declare the same.

2. Baron Hickey declares that the conception by the Holy Ghost, announced by Gabriel, corresponds with Maya's dream of the white elephant. But his story of the white dove is manufactured for the purpose; no such myth was ever held by any Christian sect.

3. He compares the coming of the wise men with frankincense with the Brahmans who hastened with congratulations to the palace of Suddhodana. There is no canonical authority for the latter, though it was a common custom, and would have no significance.

4. "As Herod was afraid of the child, so King Bimbasara told his ministers to search the land to find whether any famous child had been born." Herod meant murder; Bimbasara, according to the Jataka legends, merely sent to inquire about the great teacher and his doctrines.

5. "The Simeon of the Bible corresponds with the Brahman Asita, an aged man who came to see the thirty-two marks and the eighty signs of the Buddha." This is a clumsy after-thought. How should anybody be looking for marks of a Buddha on a Hindu baby thirty years before Buddhism had been thought of?

6. "The presentation of Jesus in the temple is similar to a corresponding one in the childhood of the Buddha."

This is one of Professor Seydel's "evident cases of borrowing." But such presentations of children were required under both the

Jewish and the Hindu systems, and the claim of any particular parallel is weak.

7. "In his twelfth year Jesus was found in the temple, discoursing with the doctors, so, also, the father of Buddha found his son in the wood, surrounded by sages, etc." This does not agree with the Sinhalese legends, which say that the Buddha's youth was given to pleasure, and that his zenana contained 40,000 dancing girls.

8. "The Buddha bathed in the stream Naranjana, and Jesus was baptized." This bath occurred when Buddha resolved to abandon his Brahmanical asceticism; he no longer regarded dirt as a means of grace. Whoever has seen a Hindu fakir besmeared with wet ashes will realize the significance of Buddha's bath, and, therefore, of Baron Hickey's parallel.

9. "The forty days' fast in the wilderness is common to both teachers." If any borrowing were required it would have been done from the life of Moses, who fasted forty days in Sinai. Buddha never fasted forty days. The "Mahavagga" tells us that after his "enlightenment" he passed twenty-eight days in *joyous meditation*. His "Middle Path" shunned fasting as one extreme. He had begun to eat. He received his enlightenment on a full stomach—the first in six years.

10. There is no real parallel in the temptations of the two, though both are said to have been tempted. Buddha was tempted, according to Southern legends, several times and in respect to different things, but not at the beginning of his ministry.

11. "The heavens opening and the voice from heaven proclaiming the teacher are to be found in the Buddhist scriptures." Where?

12. As to Buddha's Sermon on the Mount, high and breezy summits were often resorted to, especially the "Vulture's Peak." It was an incident of a hot climate in both cases.

13. "The first disciples of Jesus, and even Jesus Himself, were at first followers of John the Baptist. The number of disciples in both accounts was at first five, afterwards sixty."(?) As a matter of fact, Christ's disciples were not graduates from the school of John, but were called from their fishermen's boats. Instead of being a teacher of Jesus, John felt unworthy to unloose His shoe latchet.

14. "Both performed wonders." Buddha particularly disclaimed miraculous powers: the miracles were subsequent embellishments.

15. The incident of Buddha's walking on water needs a more particular statement with time and place and authority.

16. That both he and the Christ had a presentiment of death is very probable.

17. It is quite possible, also, that, among the thousands of Buddha's converts, were courtesans; but that the rich and brazen Ambapali who invited the Buddha and his disciples to dine, was the model after whom the Gospel narrative formed the picture of the crushed and penitent Magdalene, is far-fetched.

18. As for triumphal entries into cities—if a crowd of followers is meant, both, probably, had many—Christ at Jericho as well as at Jerusalem. Buddha is said to have been followed on one occasion by twelve hundred people, and King Bimbisara is said to have interviewed him with 80,000 of his overseers!

19. "Both systems were missionary religions from the start." This is true; but how paltry is the notion that a mere motive of imitation prompted the wide-spread evangel of Christianity!

20. We are told that "Buddha fed the hungry," instead of which he was a mendicant and carried a beggar's bowl, and never performed a miracle.

21. As to the question asked of Jesus by the by-standers: "Did this man sin or his parents that he was born blind?" If metempsychosis was in their minds, they could have borrowed it from the Greeks who had held it from the days of Pythagoras.

As to the general question, there seems to be little need of assuming that these shadowy coincidences denote borrowing on either side. Many of them are merely fanciful and are the work of modern apologists. Many others are such natural correspondences as might spring from similar causes. If incidents have in any case been borrowed, the chances are much greater that all-absorbing ever-changing Buddhism has been the copyist.

